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SUBJECT: EMBASSY OBSERVERS NOTE BOTH GOOD AND BAD
ON ELECTION DAY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On voting day, fourteen teams of Embassy election monitors noted wide discrepancies in polling station management, quality of voter lists, quality of local-observer participation, and vote counting and posting at the precinct and district levels. In many polling stations elections were well-administered and proceeded smoothly, though in other polling stations some problems were noted. Most misbehavior appeared to favor the Party of Communists (PCRM), but this appears to have resulted from old habits, especially in rural districts, rather than from any systematic, centrally-planned, effort on the part of the ruling party to defraud. While there were still many technical problems, our observers noted improvements in some problem polling stations, leading us to conclude that both international assistance and training and a desire on the part of Moldovans not to repeat the events of April, have led to some progress. End summary.

Parliament Seat Shifts

¶2. (SBU) With 98.3 percent of returns in, the major news is that the PCRM has lost its majority in Parliament: from holding 60 out of 101 seats in the short-lived Parliament elected on April 5, the PCRM has dropped to 48. The three opposition parties that won seats in April held a combined total of 41 seats; in the latest Parliament, they hold 40. The Liberal Party (PL) held steady at 15 seats; the Liberal Democrats (PLDM) increased from 15 to 17; the Our Moldova Alliance dropped from 11 to 8. The big winner was the Democratic Party (PD), which won no seats in April, under previous management, and 13 seats in July, under the new management of former Speaker, and PCRM defector, Marian Lupu.

¶3. (SBU) The means by which Moldova reached these results are a mixture of the good and well-intentioned, and the bad and mala fide. To see how things worked, the Embassy targeted a representative sample of polling stations that exhibited problems (such as unusually high turnout and lopsided vote totals) in the April elections. The Embassy's 14 teams ranged from Balti in the north to Cahul in the south. The teams monitored voting in 54 urban and 26 rural and village Precinct Election Bureaus (PEBs), accompanied ballots to two District Election Commissions (DECs) at the close of voting, and stayed through the small hours for the count at five DECs.

14. (SBU) Nearly every PEB had some problems with their voter list, including unknown people listed at various addresses, the unpurged deceased, miscopied ID numbers, and multiple listings. Even in Chisinau, which published a web-based checking system for citizen use, some problems still occurred, including the embarrassing incident in which Liberal Democrat leader Vlad Filat noted an unknown name listed at his address. On the other hand, the vast majority of people was listed correctly, those who were not could get included on a supplemental list by presenting proof of domicile. Greater citizen awareness, better civic education, and a determination to avoid the problems of April 5 all led to improved elections but, paradoxically, led to a more widespread challenging of errors and thus an impression of possibility for fraud caused by better reporting.

15. (SBU) After criticisms of dictatorial PEB presidents and passive NGO (and occasionally political party) observers in the April elections, the international and NGO community ramped up training efforts for both. Widespread public education (including 500,000 SMS messages sent just before July elections), improved training sessions for PEB staff and observers, and 10,000 copies of an updated legal manual by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), helped ensure that everyone had access to clear explanations of election law and practice. On several occasions, our monitors witnessed party observers successfully challenging PEB presidents,

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in addition to watching a PEB president hold firm against the complaints of students who lacked absentee voting cards and were therefore not allowed to vote. In both cases, the citation of chapter and verse from the IFES manual settled matters.

16. (SBU) On the other hand, and especially in the villages, Soviet customs still applied. Our monitors saw several PEBs in which PCRM observers (without the required badges) and presidents sat close to the ballot box, one of them actually inspecting an unfolded ballot before it was dropped into the box. Some PEB chairman required that monitors remain seated in one spot to observe the polling, rather than letting them walk around to monitor anywhere in the room. In one PEB, police in uniform were seen standing by the door, in violation of law. Privacy concerns were prominent at hospitals and state nursing homes, where ballots we laid out on tables; and there were reports of coercion: we heard reports that staff had told patients that they would lose their treatment and medications if they did not vote for the PCRM, and received complaints that psychiatric patients and alcoholics were guided to vote for the PCRM. However, despite the guidance, one of our monitors visiting a hospital for skin diseases noted that the vote tally showed a wide spread of support for different parties, despite the patients having to vote in front of officials.

17. (SBU) The mobile ballot boxes, designed for the shut-in and ill, and requiring a written application from the intending voter, were also a source of concern. In one PEB, officials made up the list of voters known to be elderly and sick, and our monitors accompanied the mobile ballot box to homes where these voters were clearly unprepared for its appearance. PEB officials

argued with the voters, stating that they had indeed requested the service, and guided voters to vote PCRM. In other PEBs, monitors noted what has been a common problem with the mobile ballot box dozens of pre-printed requests for service, with only the signatures individualized.

18. (SBU) Late-night counting was often chaotic. It is important to note that PEB officials work from 6:30 A.M. until the close of polls 14-and-a-half hours later, and then face the late-night task of counting ballots and reconciling numbers. In some cases, it went relatively smoothly. The DEC's, to which ballots in wax-sealed envelopes were driven by police after counting, were also mixed in performance. While the Balti DEC was a labyrinth of 16 offices on two floors and a farrago of hidden decisions and documents, and Soroca's DEC operated ad hoc and without procedures, the Ialoveni DEC, which was identified as a problem child in April elections, had undergone a complete change, with the chairman happy to show off the improvements that had been made. The DEC at Basarabasca, which was visited by the same monitor in April and July, was also much improved.

Comment:

19. (SBU) Our monitors covered a representative sample of PEBs and DEC's that had been problematical in April. It is an indication of overall improvement that many of these showed improvement, while none became significantly worse. Strong assistance from the international community, widespread training, and, above all, a desire on the part of Moldovans and their friends not to repeat the events of April, have led to what can be called arguable progress.

CHAUDHRY